

Get Out of Your Chair

Sunday, July 26, 2020

Main Text: Exodus 13:17-14:18

Supporting Texts: Exodus 12:31-32; Hebrews 4:13

INTRO

As humans, we are only capable of having one vantage point. We sit in one chair.

God is not so limited. God sees it all and knows it all. See Hebrews 4:13.

We live as if we are the expert, but do so blindly.¹ We live in a “chronically anxious society.” It is characterized by reactivity, herding, blame displacement, a quick-fix mentality, and poorly defined leadership.

If this is our reality, how do we, who have limited perspectives, get out of the chair we sit in long enough to become the kind of people the world needs in this cultural moment? How do we avoid being part of the problem by reacting, listening only to those in our herd, blaming everyone else, seeking the quick fix?

Our text is Exodus 13:17-14:18. What is it that enables Moses to lead well?

PHARAOH’S PERSPECTIVE

Let’s start by looking at this from Pharaoh’s chair.

The loss of his son compels Pharaoh to drive the Israelites out of Egypt. See Exodus 12:31-32.

Pharaoh was the most powerful man in the world, the earthly embodiment of the Egyptian god Horus—god of sun, war, and protection—and was unable to protect his people and his own son. Horus was, according to Egyptian theology, the first king of Egypt. Every subsequent pharaoh was a divine king, or at least one who people looked to as the representative of the god.

For Pharaoh, the problem is still the Israelites and Moses. He is unable to stop long enough to see that the problem is him. So he tries to solve his problem using the method he’s good at, the method he’s “god” at—war. **From Pharaoh’s chair, this is all about war/revenge after failing to protect his people and family.**

GOD’S PERSPECTIVE

God led the people by an indirect route, knowing full well what they could handle. God knew what they could handle, but they did not. This is how God works—he understands our emotional capacity, our limits, our ability to withstand adversity.

God hardens the heart of Pharaoh in verse 8, and because of this, Pharaoh pursues Israel. But let’s not confuse what’s going on here. God is not pulling on Pharaoh’s puppet strings. The hardening of the heart is a theme in Exodus for how God and Pharaoh interact. There are times when God hardens his heart, and other times when Pharaoh hardens his own heart. There are Egyptian documents that use phrases like “strength of heart” and “weight of heart” to describe what is going on here. It exemplifies courage, restraint, self-control, and strength. What God is doing is enhancing the leadership qualities Pharaoh is already

¹ The following section is drawn from Friedman, Edwin. *Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, pp. 58-89.

exercising, which are highly valued in Egyptian culture. What starts out being his strength becomes his weakness as it is pushed to the limit. The qualities that made Pharaoh a good leader for his people lead to his own downfall. God knows Pharaoh's heart and doesn't have to control Pharaoh in the least bit, for Pharaoh will simply continue down the road he's already traveling on, and it will lead to a watery grave.²

From God's chair, the way he leads his people isn't about their deliverance for their sake—it's their deliverance for his sake. It's not only about forming for himself a people, but also about changing his relationship with the Egyptians.

We are tempted to think that God must act for my benefit, for my enrichment, to strengthen my faith. But what if he gives us particular difficulties so that others will see him in action and glorify him? **From God's chair, this is all about rescuing his people for his glory.**

ISRAEL'S PERSPECTIVE

They are sarcastic—Is it because of a lack of graves in Egypt that we get to die out here? They are full of blame—What have **you** done by bringing us out of Egypt? They are the experts who saw this coming—Didn't we say to you in Egypt, "Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians"? And they revert to black and white thinking. There are only two options—It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness. **From Israel's chair, this is all about wandering and complaining.**

MOSES

In the middle of it all is Moses. If God doesn't reveal to Moses what he sees, then all Moses sees is the complaining around him. But in that moment, Moses doesn't engage in the complaining game, make them out to be the bad guy, or even take it personally. He addresses them, this anxious group, to say, "Get out of your chair long enough to see things from God's perspective. Pay attention, for neither complaining nor fighting will win the day."

US

Now more than ever, our society needs men and women who have the ability to hear the voice of God, to discern the mind of Christ in the situations they find themselves in. In order to do that, we'll have to get out of our chairs long enough to see things from God's perspective.

This week,

1. **Make a list of the things you cannot see, but that God can see.** You might include things like another person's motives or heart or mind, the days you have left on this earth, why a tragedy happens, how your actions will impact another person for eternity.
2. **Don't voice your opinion to anyone about current events**—the election, the coronavirus, racism, the economy, what schools will do this fall. Keep your mouth shut when the conversation inevitably turns to a hot topic. Test it for a week and see what happens.
3. When you're in a situation where things look bleak and you're tempted to jump in with the herd and blame someone else, **ask**, "Lord, what does my desire to complain reveal about the condition of my heart?" or "Lord, what does my desire to fight for myself reveal about me?"
4. **Ask God to help you lead rather than being part of your herd.** Ask Him how you can help others not simply see things from your perspective, but see them from His.

² Drawn from McAfee, Matthew. "The Heart of Pharaoh in Exodus 4-15." *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 20 3 (2010). pp. 331-354.